

Iraqi special forces commander sees optimism in Iraq

By Jennifer Whittle
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Brigadier General Najah Hussan Al-Shamary commands more than a thousand Iraqi special operators that are personally trained by U.S. Army Special Forces in a country where violence is normal, but change for the better is becoming the norm.

The number of suicide bombings decreased after Iraq's elections in January.

"It's getting much better. After the election you can see new markets, there is a sparkle in people's eyes, and we get better intelligence," Najah said from a quiet corner of the Tampa Convention Center, Tampa, Fla., during U.S. Special Operations Command's International Special Operations Forces Week June 6-10.

Fifty-eight countries united at the convention to strengthen the SOF Coalition and enhance global security. One way USSOCOM completes this task is through foreign internal defense. The Iraqi Special Operations Forces brigade is a successful example.

The key to defeating terrorism in Iraq is to get rid of the insurgents, Najah said. "We are doing that with the help of the United States and other countries. The insurgents pose a serious threat to the stability of our government. We do not want our country to be an open field for criminal activity. Coalition SOF and U.S. Special Forces are helping us accomplish that."

Those criminals, Najah said, are outlaws. "They are motivated by money. But the more we tighten the noose, the less insurgent activity we see."

Last year, U.S. Special Forces led missions to root out insurgents. Now ISOF takes the lead more and more, explained Col. Michael Repass, commander of Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – Arabian Peninsula. "We have advisers that are fully immersed in their units. In the early stages of their training, we had more SF with ISOF. As they grow more proficient, we fall back more and allow them the autonomy to operate."

Najah is impressed with Special Forces' advanced technology and mind-training, he said, but it is the camaraderie of his special operators with SF that makes it work. "They are more than friends. When the SF units rotate and Soldiers return to the U.S., they keep contact [with their Iraqi counterparts] and maintain friendship. It is vice versa with ISOF soldiers. We sleep together, eat together and train together — we fight together."

The Iraq that the ISOF general envisions is a couple years out, he said. "My country will have more stability in two or three years. The elections — this visit to SOF Week — the American SOF having more of an advisory role and ISOF taking the lead on operations — these are all things that continue to build Iraq. Iraqis are fighting the insurgents now."

The Commander of Special Operations Command Central Brig. Gen. Francis Kearney reiterated the importance of the mission of training ISOF. "We are getting in front of the wave. Training Iraqis, and other forces like in Horn of Africa, builds relationships with people and with nations. It results in intelligence to map terrorist networks like al Qaeda; it tightens up borders; and not only stops the movement of terrorists, but stops the conditions that breed terrorism."

Iraq is one of 28 countries in Kearney's Central Area of Responsibility. "In Iraq alone, SF teaches planning, values, loyalty to nation, respecting humans, and training-the-trainer mindsets," he said. "The success of the Operation Detachment Alphas (12-man SF team) working with the Iraqis is excellent."

Najah said his fellow countrymen are happy and families believe in the new military and its special forces. "Parents bring their sons to be recruited. The last selection process for special operators expected about 400 recruits. More than 1,000 were motivated to enter Iraqi Special Operations Forces. This proves the spirit in Iraq is high. But Iraq still needs help, from Coalition SOF and U.S. Special Forces."



Brig. Gen. Najah Hussan Al-Shamary (left), Iraqi Special Operations Forces commander, is greeted by Gen. Doug Brown, U.S. Special Operations Command commander, while visiting the static displays on the MacDill AFB Flight Line, Fla., during the first International Special Operations Forces Week. Included in the photo are the interpreter (center) and Iraqi Brig. Gen. Nedahl Moth'her Al-Rikaby, Iraqi SOF deputy commander (right). Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jim Moser.